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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/I, S/CRS, AND NEA/ARP
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SUBJECT: HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS CENTER - HERE TO HELP

¶1. SUMMARY: Kuwait's Humanitarian Operations Center (HOC) can assist NGOs with shipping of their supplies (even free shipping) to Iraq, obtaining Kuwait and Iraq customs clearances, and Kuwait entry visas for medical cases granted treatment in Kuwait or abroad. The HOC desires to increase humanitarian shipments by NGOs to Iraq, but to do that, needs to hear from NGOs on what is needed and where. GOK has pledged its support to the HOC for as long as needed. END SUMMARY.

¶2. Emboff attended a briefing on Kuwait's Humanitarian Operations Center (HOC) given by HOC Director (and former Kuwaiti Chief of Staff) LTG Ali Al-Mu'men and LTC Bob Lehman, USARCENT, at the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) HQ in Kuwait City on May 8, 2007. Also in attendance were representatives from UNHCR, WHO, UNDP, France, Denmark, IOM-Iraq, UNAMI, US Third Army, and NGOs (MercyCorps, War Child UK, InterSOS.org, Danish Refugee Council.)

Let's Meet Again

¶3. LTG Ali opened by commenting that the HOC has seen many changes in the last few years. At first, the HOC used to have daily meetings with over 165 different NGOs and aid organizations. (Note: Out of the approx. 30 people attending the meeting, less than 10 were from NGOs. End note.) The HOC closed after the elections in Iraq, but then re-opened later. Ali said it is better to meet face-to-face with NGOs working in Iraq and that the GOK wants to know about their activities so they can help. Meetings such as these help information exchange and can generate ideas. The HOC now plans to meet monthly with NGOs or even more frequently as interest warrants.

What the HOC Can Do for NGOs - FREE SHIPPING

¶4. The HOC's mission is "to facilitate, coordinate and support humanitarian assistance to the people of Iraq by promoting the entrance into Iraq by corporate, International Organization, Non-Governmental Organizations, and individual donors and by enhancing relationships with Kuwaiti Ministries, NGOs and USAID contractors." HOC officials said they aim to increase the number of container loads of humanitarian shipments to Iraq from Kuwait. The HOC can help with logistics and offered to move humanitarian supplies free of charge for NGOs. The HOC recently sent medical supplies to the Basrah Medical College. They have also shipped 1,650 wheelchairs and school supplies to various locations in Iraq. They can reach back to U.S. charities to help them connect donors with needed projects in Iraq. To increase humanitarian shipments, the HOC needs to hear from NGOs.

Medical Cases, Visas for Iraqis and Customs Clearances

¶15. HOC officials also highlighted their role in sending medical cases to Kuwait, Europe and the United States for treatment since expertise is lacking in Iraq. Many of these have been pediatric cases. NGOs can recommend Iraqi medical cases requiring treatment abroad to the HOC for consideration. NGOs should also let the HOC know where medical supplies are needed so the HOC can assist.

¶16. In response to a question about Kuwait entry visas for Iraqis going through Kuwait for training abroad, LTG Ali said that the HOC now has a 99% success rate. After speaking to the Foreign Minister, LTG Ali said humanitarian cases are now approved at the MFA first after vetting by Kuwait security services before going to Immigration. The HOC wants to help legitimate NGOs who present visa cases. He emphasized that NGOs should be registered in Kuwait and should present cases in a timely manner rather than at the last minute. He said multiple entry visas (for NGOs' Iraqi employees) would be very difficult at this time but to contact the HOC and he would see what they could do.

¶17. The HOC can also facilitate customs clearance in Kuwait and Iraq. NGOs mentioned difficulties they were having shipping goods through Basrah and Safwan. Ali said to contact the HOC and he can get Iraq customs clearances while the goods are in Kuwait.

HOC Is Here to Stay

¶18. When asked about how long the HOC will operate, Ali replied that the GOK supports the HOC and will continue to do so as long as needed.

¶19. Persons having any questions about the Kuwait HOC can contact DeWitt Conklin, U.S. Embassy Kuwait at ConklinDC@state.gov, tel:

KUWAIT 00000746 002 OF 002

+965-259-1533; or HOC Director LTC Mark Stevens at mark.s.stevens@kuwait.swa.army.mil, tel: +965-484-1901. The next HOC meeting for NGOs is scheduled for June 5.

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LeBaron